A Journey to the Centre of the Earth

and other stories



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A Journey to the Centre of the Earth

and other stories

CAMBRIGE
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ISBN 9971 4 0350 1

Printed by Koon Wah Printing (S) Pte Ltd

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Preface

Federal Simplified Classics is a series of junior literature books written in simple language for lower secondary pupils. Pupils studying English literature for the first time should be given enough help and incentive so that they will find literature an interesting and worthwhile subject. Hence, these simplified stories, because they are so well known, provide the foundation upon which the pupils can build up their interest in and appreciation of literature. Finally, the innate curiosity of children together with the exciting stories in this series may stimulate pupils to enjoy reading for its own sake.

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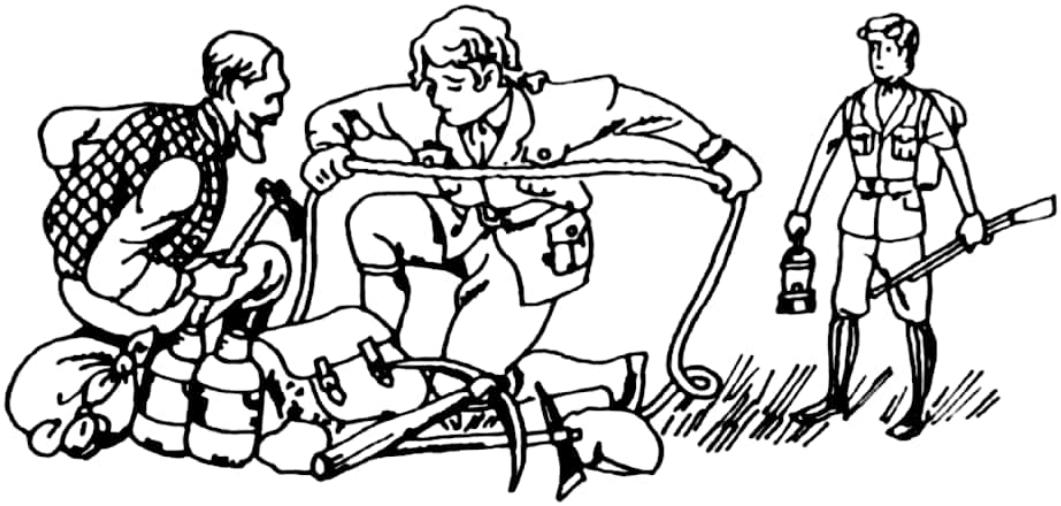
Jules Verne



retold in simple language
by Joyce Faraday

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A Journey to the Centre of the Earth

My name is Axel. Some years ago, when my parents died, I went to live in Hamburg with my uncle, Professor Lidenbrock, and his god-daughter Grauben. Unknown to my uncle, Grauben and I planned to marry one day. My uncle was a famous scientist who taught the study of rocks and minerals at the University. He was a tall, thin, restless man with a quick temper. I worked as his assistant. He was fond of me and, as long as I did all that he wanted, we got on well together.

One day my uncle brought home an old book about Iceland. As he flicked through the pages a small piece of paper fell out. On it were strange Runic signs, and we puzzled over it for a long time. Suddenly I saw that by reading the message backwards it made sense. It read:

'Go to the Sneffels volcano. Each year, on the last day of June, only one of its

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craters is in shadow. Go down that crater and you will journey to the centre of the Earth. I have done this.'

'That's Arne Saknussemm!' exclaimed my uncle, pointing to the signature. 'He was a great scientist in Iceland in the sixteenth century. The greatest of them all! If he could make such a journey, so can we!'

'We can journey to the centre of the Earth?' I asked in alarm.

'Yes, Axel,' he replied. 'We will follow in his footsteps. And we must leave soon, for we must be at the volcano before July.'

So it was that after a few days, during which we packed tools, instruments and clothes, we left Hamburg. Grauben and I were sad to part but she promised to marry me on my return. I wondered to myself if I *would* return!

It took us about ten days to sail to Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. My uncle was seasick for the whole voyage, and he only cheered up when we came in sight of the Sneffels volcano. In Reykjavik we stayed at the house of a schoolmaster, who arranged for a guide to take us to the volcano.

The guide's name was Hans. He was tall and strong. He had wise, blue eyes and his

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chestnut hair reached his broad shoulders. His quiet ways made me feel he could be trusted. He got on well with my uncle, which was very important.

We planned to start on June 10th. Horses were hired to carry our baggage. We bought tools, rifles, gunpowder and gun-cotton, a first-aid box and strong boots. My uncle packed two compasses, and other instruments which would help us on our journey. I was glad to see he packed two portable electric lamps.

We had food for six months but, to my surprise, our only water was in our water flasks.

'We shall find underground springs and fill our flasks as we need to,' my uncle said when I questioned him.

I hoped he was right. I knew that many of the springs in Iceland are boiling hot. There were other things, too, which worried me about the journey.

'How can we be sure the volcano is extinct?' I asked. 'Just because it hasn't erupted since 1229, we can't be sure it never will again.'

'You need not fear,' the Professor replied. 'There are no signs at all that it will erupt. We'll be quite safe.' I could say no more,

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since he was not a man to argue with. So we set off.

It took us a week to reach the Sneffels volcano. As we climbed it, the going was hard and the wind bitterly cold. We reached the summit at night and I was worn out. But that night we slept well and in the morning were ready to climb down to the bottom of the crater where we could see three huge holes. It was from these great chimneys that the volcano had last erupted.

My uncle ran from one chimney to the other. It was now the end of June and only one chimney was in shadow. That one was to be our way into the centre of the Earth.

Then my uncle called to me. 'Look!' he cried. He pointed to a block of rock near the chimney, where I could just make out some worn Runic letters carved in the rock.

'Arne Saknussemm,' I read. There could be no doubt that this was the chimney.

On June 30th, with our baggage on our backs, we started on our amazing journey. When I looked down into the chimney, I felt dizzy. The walls went straight down but there were rocks sticking out from the sides. Slowly, with ropes, we let ourselves down from rock to rock.

We rested often and, after ten and a half

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hours, we reached the bottom of the chimney. Now we were eight hundred and fifty metres down. That night, as I lay down to sleep, I could see a star in the patch of sky above the dark chimney.

The next morning we heaved our packs onto our backs. My uncle lit an electric lamp and we set off through a dark passage. It sloped steeply down and we had difficulty in stopping ourselves from slipping. At long last my uncle called a halt. We ate hungrily and drank some of our water. So far we had seen no underground springs – and already half our water had gone.

The following day I was surprised to find we were walking uphill. It was tiring, and I began to hope we would come up to the surface again. Then I would soon be back in Hamburg with Grauben! But the day after, the gallery took us gently downwards again. We had still not found water and I was worried, for we had only half a flask left.

Still we pressed on. Just as I was wondering how long we could last without water, the light from the lamp showed a solid wall in front of us. We looked for a side passage. There was no way forward. We had to go back to find the right way.

Another day passed, and we drank the

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last of the water. After two days more we were so weak that we could not go on, and stopped to rest. I begged my uncle to return to the surface. But he was still sure we would find water. I begged Hans to turn back, but he was happy to obey my uncle. 'Trust me, Axel,' my uncle said. There was nothing more I could do. After a sleep we felt stronger and started down another turning. As the day wore on, I became weaker. I began to feel that we were in a prison of rock from which we would never escape. As I fell down in a faint I cried out to my uncle.

When I came round I could dimly see my uncle asleep beside me. A noise made me sit up. Hans was disappearing with the lamp in his hand. Surely our honest guide would not leave us now! I fell into a troubled sleep and was awakened by the return of Hans. He shook my uncle and told him he had heard water running lower in the cave. Quickly we dressed.

Slowly, we went down. The sound of the water gave me new life. But there was no sign of water and, as we went on, the sound grew fainter. We returned to where the sound was loudest. Hans put his ear to the rock wall, where we could hear an underground river running behind the rock.

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Hans took up his pickaxe and swung blow after blow until the rock gave way. A jet of water shot into the tunnel, and Hans let out a cry of pain as the water hit him. It was boiling hot! When it cooled in our flasks we drank thirstily. The water made a little stream that now flowed along the side of the passage. We called it 'The Hans', after our guide who had saved us.

Now that we had water, I felt strong and full of hope again. The stream would always flow beside us and lead us downwards. Now the passage twisted in all directions. My uncle worked out that we were eleven kilometres under the ground and a hundred and twenty kilometres south-west of Reykjavik. But he wanted to get deeper and was delighted when we came to a steep shaft. It was as steep as the first chimney, but we were able to climb down a huge rock staircase. At the end of that stage of our journey my uncle was better pleased. We were thirty kilometres below the Atlantic Ocean and two hundred kilometres from our starting place.

From then on, each day took us a few kilometres deeper. I led the way, holding my lamp in front of me. Then, suddenly, I found I was alone. I went back and called, but no one answered. Again I shouted. There was

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no reply. I knew that, with the little stream running beside me, I could easily retrace my steps. I bent down to take a drink. To my horror, there was no water. I had taken a wrong turning!

My way back was hard. There were many side passages and turnings and I could not remember which way I had come.

Turning a corner, I bumped into a solid wall of rock. As I fell I dropped the lamp. It went out and I was alone and lost in the dark. Panic gripped me. I ran from wall to wall, stumbling and shouting. At last I fell down, exhausted.

After a while, I felt my cuts and bruises, then sat in despair, not knowing what to do. In the silence I heard noises like thunder. Then I heard voices. Surely I was going mad! I put my ear to the wall. I still heard voices but could not make out any words. With all my might I shouted, 'Help!' I waited but no answer came. My ear was pressed against the rock. At last I heard my uncle's voice calling me.

'Where are you, Axel?' he called.

'I don't know,' I shouted. 'I'm lost!'

'We'll get you out,' he answered. 'We're in a big cave with many tunnels leading into it. If you walk downhill you'll reach it

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I set off down the steep slope, sliding and stumbling. Soon the slope became so steep that I began to fall. The ground disappeared from under me. I fell down a deep shaft. My head felt a sharp blow and I remembered no more.

I slowly opened my eyes. My uncle was kneeling beside me and he cried with joy to see I was alive.

'You are safe, Axel,' he said. 'You will soon be better. Sleep and rest and get strong again.

I was too weak to ask what had happened to me. I sank into a deep sleep. In the morning my bandaged head ached but I felt stronger. As we ate breakfast, my uncle told me that there had been a rockfall in the tunnel I had been in. I had pitched down with the falling rock, into the cave where now my uncle and Hans were caring for me. It was a miracle that I had not been killed.

Now that I was feeling better, I started to look round the cave. I could see clearly and yet no lamp was burning. There were sounds, too: the sounds of waves and of wind. I thought I must be imagining these things and asked my uncle about them.

'Yes, you are quite right,' he told me.

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'Are we back on the surface?' I asked.

'No,' he told me firmly. 'In a while you may see for yourself. When you are fit, we will start on our voyage.'

What could he mean by 'voyage'? I could wait no longer to find out. 'Uncle,' I said, 'I'm strong and well enough now. Show me what you have found.'

We walked out of the dim cave into bright light. My eyes were dazzled by the light shining on water.

'I have called it "The Lidenbrock Sea",' my uncle said proudly. It was indeed a sea. Waves broke on the shore. Cliffs stretched into the distance. The light was not warm like the sun's nor cold like the moon's. It was strong and even. I was sure it was from natural electricity of some kind.

We still seemed to be in a cave. Yet what cave was big enough to hold such a great sea? It was kilometres high, for the clouds above us were higher than normal clouds. There was no way to judge the length or width of the cave, for the sea stretched further than we could see. After forty days in dark underground tunnels, it was a joy to breathe sea air and to gaze into the distance.

Together, my uncle and I walked along

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the shore. We came to a vast forest of giant mushroom trees, ten or twelve metres high. There were other plants too, but all of them were plants that had grown on Earth millions of years ago. On the sandy shore we found the dried bones of prehistoric animals. It was like finding treasure.

'Look!' I cried. 'The jawbone of a mammoth.'

My uncle however was eager to explore the sea. The next morning found me perfectly well again. I even went for a swim before eating the breakfast Hans had made for us. Then my uncle worked out that we were fourteen hundred kilometres from Iceland and still moving south-east. This put us about a hundred and thirty kilometres below the mountains of Scotland.

'But how can we get nearer to the centre of the Earth on a flat sea?' I asked him.

'I don't know,' he replied, 'but I'm sure that, if we cross the sea, we'll find more openings leading downwards.'

I asked him how we could cross the sea without a boat. Hans, he told me, was already at work building a raft.

By evening the raft was finished, and floating on the Lidenbrock Sea.

We loaded the raft the next morning. A

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blanket served as a sail. With Hans at the tiller, we were ready to leave. Before leaving however we named our little harbour Port Grauben. The thought of Grauben made me long to return home. But the way home was now forward. We sailed out into the sea.

The weather was fine, the clouds high and the wind strong. Hans threw out a fishing line and landed a fine big fish. My uncle said it was a fish long extinct on Earth. Hans had caught a living fossil! Hours passed and there was no sight of land. My uncle was growing restless. He wanted to get to a lower depth, and began to wonder if we had come the wrong way. In silence we sailed on.

My uncle dropped a pickaxe, tied to a piece of cord, to measure the depth of the sea. The cord was over three hundred and fifty metres long, but it did not touch bottom. Then, when we pulled the pickaxe back on board, we found teeth marks on the iron. Nothing less than a monster crocodile could have made such marks! I checked our guns in case we should need them. We could feel danger everywhere, but saw nothing. Weary of watching, I fell asleep. A violent shock awoke me. The raft was lifted up and thrown thirty metres or more.

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Hans pointed to a dark mass rising and falling in the water a short distance away. It looked like a giant porpoise.

My uncle pointed to a huge sea-lizard and a crocodile with rows of teeth.

'And there's a monster whale,' he yelled. 'See it lashing the water with its tail!'

We all stared at the sight in amazement and horror. The smallest of these animals could snap our raft in half. More terrifying animals appeared – a huge turtle and a serpent ten metres long, darting its head above the waves. All the monsters were moving towards us and I held my rifle at the ready. The serpent and the crocodile circled nearer. The rest seemed to disappear. I was about to shoot when Hans stopped me.

The monsters were not going to attack us. Instead they flew at one another, lashing the water and rising out of the foaming waves. We then saw that there were only two animals. One had the snout of a porpoise, the head of a lizard and the teeth of a crocodile. We were seeing a prehistoric ichthyosaurus fighting a plesiosaurus!

The ichthyosaurus must have been thirty metres long. Its great jaws were terrifying. The body of the plesiosaurus was protected

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by a thick shell and its long neck rose ten metres above the waves. The great beasts fought with fury, using teeth and tails. Huge waves nearly overturned us. For over two hours they fought. Then both animals sank below the surface. The head of the wounded plesiosaurus rose up, whipping and waving, coiling and uncoiling. Slowly it lost its strength and lay still. The battle was over. We breathed again but feared the ichthyosaurus still below the sea. For the moment we were safe.

About midday on the sixth day on the raft we heard a roaring noise. At first I thought it was waves breaking on rocks, or a waterfall. Hans climbed the mast and saw a great jet of water rising from the sea. We thought it was another giant sea-monster! By eight o'clock that evening we could make out something about a kilometre long lying in the sea. The jet of water rained down upon it. I was terrified.

'It's an island,' Hans suddenly called out.

'But what about the jet of water? I asked.

'A geyser,' my uncle answered. 'It's like those in Iceland.'

Now the jet of water looked beautiful. The light sparkled on the water and made a rainbow. We landed on the island and the

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ground trembled under our feet. It was burning hot. The water from the geyser was boiling and filled the air with clouds of steam. Such heat must have come from fires burning deep underground. I was sure that if we went deeper we must reach the burning depths. But my uncle became angry when I told him of my fears. I kept quiet, for now I could be sure of nothing.

Before leaving the island I noted that we were one thousand and eighty kilometres from Port Grauben where we had set sail on this sea. We must have been somewhere under England. The following day the wind was strong and we sailed even faster. The clouds thickened and the sky grew darker. The air was full of electricity as if gathering for a storm. The coming storm added to my uncle's anger. He did not want it to hold us up. Then the wind dropped, and nothing moved.

I asked if I should take down the sail and mast before the storm started, but my uncle said 'no' to this.

'Let the wind carry us away!' he said. 'Perhaps we shall then reach the other side of this endless sea!'

As if in answer, the wind rose and became a hurricane. The raft tossed and bounded

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ahead. We clung to it as the wind raged. Hans however sat calmly at the tiller. The electricity in the air played on his hair. He seemed to have a strange light round his head. The wind blew us along at a great speed. The rain beat down. Thunder rolled and lightning flashed all round us. Massive hailstones fell. They made a bright electric flash as they hit our tools or any metal. Even the crests of the waves were edged with flames.

It seemed as if the whole world was blowing up in a great explosion. For three days we were blown before the gale. I clung to the mast and feared we would drown. Then a ball of fire landed on the raft. The mast and sail were flung into the air. The fireball was half white and half blue and about twenty five centimetres across. It jumped from rope to deck and from our sacks to boxes, spinning fast as it moved. For a second it touched a bag of gunpowder. By a miracle we were not blown up.

The fireball rolled near my foot and I tried to move away. But my foot was held fast to the deck. I saw that all the iron of the raft was magnetised by the fireball. The iron nails in my boots were clinging to an iron plate in the deck! With a pull I freed myself. The fireball burst in a blaze. Flames covered

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us. Then all went dark. We threw ourselves to the deck to rest and regain our strength. The wind still raged but we were too tired to care. I only knew that we were being carried along at a great speed and must have passed under France.

Dazed and weak we were at last flung up on a rocky coast. I would have been dashed to pieces had not Hans pulled me out of the wild sea. He saved my uncle too, and then went back to save what he could of our goods from the wreck.

We awoke to a beautiful day and felt rested. My uncle was even bright and cheerful now that we had crossed the sea. 'Now we can really start going down again,' he said. My heart sank at the thought of going yet deeper into the Earth. I longed to get back to Hamburg and to Grauben.

Hans had collected together our goods from the wreck. Our guns had gone, but the gunpowder and gun-cotton were safe and dry. We still had a compass, some other instruments and tools and ropes. Most of our food had been saved and we had enough for four months. After breakfast we sat down to work out where we were and to plan our next step.

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'Hans is mending the raft,' my uncle said, 'but I don't think we'll need it again. I've an idea we'll not get out the way we came in.'

I wondered what he meant and how he knew.

As the storm had blown us to the south-east, we agreed we must be somewhere under the Mediterranean. We looked at the compass to check our position, but what we saw puzzled us. We checked again. According to the compass we were back on the side of the sea from which we had started. Sadly, we decided that the wind had changed during the storm and driven us back.

My uncle was at first surprised and then angry. He stormed and raged. I begged him to turn back but nothing would make him change his mind. Hans quietly obeyed his master. Again there was nothing I could do but go on.

Whilst Hans worked on the raft, my uncle and I set out to explore. We walked along the shore, which was covered with the shells of prehistoric animals. We also found some huge turtle shells. Soon we came upon piles of bones. There were the bones of every kind of animal that had ever lived.

'Look at this, Axel!' the Professor called

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in a trembling voice. 'A human skull!'

I was no less amazed than my uncle. A few more steps brought an even greater shock. There, in the dust, was the body of a prehistoric man. It still had flesh, hair and nails and seemed almost alive! We had seen the bones of dinosaurs and also seen live ones. Here was the body of a prehistoric man. Would we find a live man?

We walked on. In about a kilometre we came to a great forest. There were trees and plants from a world of millions of years ago. But these plants were not green. Without sunlight they were all a faded brown. My uncle pushed on through the bushes and into the forest. Under the trees something moved. We stopped and peered through the leaves. There, before us, was a herd of prehistoric elephants, the gigantic mastodons. They were feeding on leaves which they tore from the trees with their trunks.

Come on,' whispered my uncle. 'Let's go on

It wouldn't be safe if they charged,' I warned him.

'Perhaps not,' he agreed in a low voice. 'Look over there!'

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I could not believe my eyes. Leaning against a tree was a man. He was keeping watch over his herd of mastodons. He was at least four metres tall, and taller than the mastodons. His head was as big as a bison's and he had a thick mane of matted hair. He held the branch of a tree in his hand.

This was no place to stay and we got away quickly. Once out of the forest, we ran towards the shore. We then looked for signs that we were near Port Grauben but could find none. As we walked on the beach I saw something shining in the sand. I picked up a rusty dagger. We looked at it carefully. The dagger was old, and rust showed it had lain in the sand for a long time.

'This belonged to someone who came here before us!' said my uncle. 'Perhaps we'll find something to show us the way to the centre of the Earth.'

We searched the cliffs and at last found a dark tunnel. By the entrance, scratched into the rock, were Runic signs.

'A.S.! Arne Saknussemm!' shouted my uncle.

Once more we knew we were on the right path.

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'I can't explain how we travelled north, my uncle said. 'I was sure we were going south-east. But here we are, in the right place. That's all that matters!'

We went back to Hans. Together we sailed the raft along the coast until we reached Arne Saknussemm's tunnel. We went ashore. I was keen to explore the passage, and when my uncle lit his electric lamp, I led the way.

The opening led straight into the tunnel, but in a short distance we found our way blocked by a huge rock.

'How did Saknussemm get through?' I asked angrily.

'This rock must have fallen since he was here,' my uncle replied.

'Then let's use our gun-cotton and blow it out of our way,' I suggested.

Hans got his pickaxe and made a hole in the rock. He packed it with gun-cotton. Then my uncle and I made a fuse, using damp gunpowder in a linen tube. By midnight all was ready.

We were awake and ready early the next morning. We decided that I would light the fuse and then join the others on the raft. While the fuse burned we would push out

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with the raft so that when the explosion came, we would be away from danger.

I picked up the fuse and opened my lantern to get a light. Then I lit the fuse and made sure it was burning well. I raced back to the raft. Hans pushed off. At a safe distance from shore we waited. The seconds ticked by. Suddenly, the rock exploded. We stared into a bottomless pit. The sea swelled into a great wave and the raft tossed madly. We were thrown to the deck and there was no light. In the darkness the roar of water filled my ears. We had blown up a rock which blocked the entrance to a pit · leading down to the centre of the Earth. Now that the rock had gone, the sea could rush in, carrying us with it!

We were rushing on roaring water down into the Earth. We clung to one another, and to the raft. We rushed down and down at high speed in complete darkness. Then Hans managed to light a lantern, and we saw that all our cargo had gone except for a compass and a little food. The water fell steeply and sometimes we spun round. When the lantern burned out I shut my eyes and waited. Our speed increased. The fall grew steeper. Time seemed endless. There was a sudden shock, and the raft almost stopped.

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We had hit a water-spout and the water was falling on the raft. I was sure we would be drowned. But we surfaced and all was silence. After the roaring of the water it seemed strangely quiet.

'We're going up!' called my uncle.

Hans lit a torch. We were rising on the water in a narrow shaft. Escape seemed impossible. As the water rose, the heat grew greater. Soon the water below us was boiling. The walls of the shaft were burning hot. In the light of the torch I thought I saw the rocks move. There was a loud explosion. The walls of the shaft shook. In terror, I looked at my uncle. To my surprise he was calm.

The Earth is moving!' I called to him.

'This is no earthquake, Axel,' he said. 'We're in the chimney of an erupting volcano! This is the best thing that could have happened to us! We will be carried up to the surface!'

All we could do was sit and wait whilst we were carried upwards.

Below the water were burning rocks. If we ever reached the surface the rocks would be hurled out in a red-hot explosion.

Towards morning the air grew hotter and

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our speed increased. I saw tunnels into the walls of the shaft. Smoke and flames poured from them. Our raft floated on red-hot lava. The heat was terrible. The raft whirled round in a shower of hot ash. Flames sprang up all around us. It seemed all must be lost. I fainted.

When I came to my senses I felt Hans' strong hand on me. We were lying on the side of a volcano. We were all cut and bruised, but not badly hurt. I could not believe that we were lying in the sun on the surface of the Earth.

'Where can we be?' I asked.

'Perhaps the compass can help us,' said my uncle.

I checked the compass. 'If the compass is right,' I told him, 'we're at the North Pole!'

We looked at the countryside around us. Below we saw trees. There were olives, figs and vines. The sun was hot. This was not Iceland! We decided to go down the slope of the volcano and look for a village. We were tired and dirty and our clothes were in rags. We found a stream and gladly cooled ourselves and drank thirstily.

A small boy saw us and started to run away but Hans caught him. My uncle spoke to the boy in German and French but he did

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not answer. Then, in answer to a question in Italian, the boy replied, 'Stromboli.' We were on Stromboli in the Mediterranean Sea. We had travelled from the volcano in Iceland to Stromboli in the Mediterranean. What a journey we had made through the Earth!

We went down to the coast where the people thought we had been shipwrecked. They gave us food and clothes and, in two days, sent us on our way home. As we sat quietly in boats and trains we puzzled over the mystery of the compass. But all this was forgotten when we reached Hamburg.

Grauben was overjoyed to see us. The news of our strange journey had spread through the country. Soon it spread through the world. Great scientists came to talk with the famous Professor Lidenbrock and his assistant. The quiet Hans soon felt homesick, and we sadly watched him leave to return to Iceland. So, at last, everyone was happy. All had turned out well for us. But there was still the mystery of the compass.

One day, in the study, I picked up the compass and looked at it. The answer was clear.

'Look, uncle,' I said. 'The needle points south instead of north. That fireball in the

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storm magnetised all the iron. It changed the poles of the compass. It made it point south, not north!'

'Of course,' said the Professor. 'So simple that I never thought of it.'

With that last mystery solved my uncle became a very contented man. I could not have been happier. As we had planned, Grauben and I were married and we all three lived happily together in Hamburg.



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Treasure Island

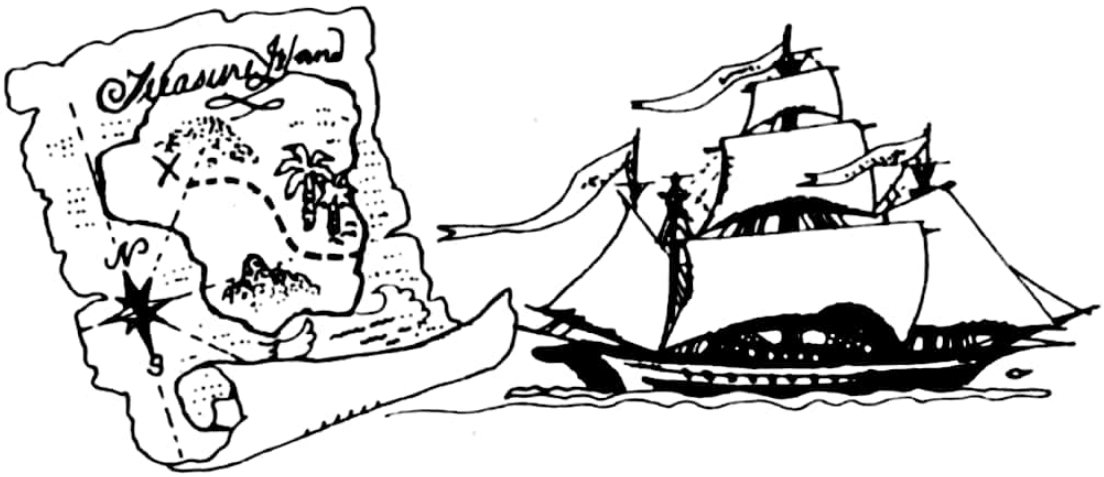
Robert Louis Stevenson



retold in simple language
by Joyce Faraday

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Treasure Island

I remember, as if it were yesterday, the old seaman who came to live at our inn. He was tall and strong and his black pigtail hung on his shoulders. His hands were rough and he had a white scar across one cheek. His name was Billy Bones and when he was drunk, as he often was, we were all afraid of him. He never talked to any of the sailors who called at the inn, and he paid me fourpence a month to warn him if I should ever see a sailor with one leg.

My father was ill at the time and I was left to look after Billy Bones. He drank so much that Dr Livesey warned him that rum would kill him. But he didn't care to change his ways and, when he lay weak and helpless in his bed, he told me a bit about himself.

He had been the mate on board the pirate ship of Captain Flint. When the captain was dying he had given Billy Bones the map that showed where his treasure was buried.

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Since that day the rest of Flint's old crew had tried to get hold of the map. It was hidden in Billy Bones' sea-chest.

One frosty afternoon an old blind seaman, Blind Pew, called at the inn. He gripped Billy Bones' hand as he left and something passed from his hand to Billy's. I saw the fear in Billy's eyes when he looked into his hand.

'The black spot!' he cried. 'Jim Hawkins, listen to me. This black spot means that my old shipmates are coming to get me. They're after my map, Jim! They'll kill me!' He sprang up as he spoke and the strain and shock must have been too much. He fell dead at my feet.

Billy Bones died without paying his bills. My mother and I took from his sea-chest some of his money to pay what he owed. There was also a bundle of papers which I took for safe keeping.

That very night a gang of ruffians attacked our inn. My mother and I hid outside and watched as they searched Billy Bones' sea-chest. Unable to find what they wanted, they shouted and raged. I realised that the bundle of papers in my pocket was what they were after.

I went to Dr Livesey and Squire Trelawney

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and told them the whole story. When we opened the bundle we found Captain Flint's treasure map, and the Squire was very excited. 'Flint was the most bloodthirsty pirate that ever sailed,' he cried. 'I'll fit out a ship in Bristol! I'll take you, doctor, and you too, Jim Hawkins, and some of my men. We'll have that treasure!' So it was that Squire Trelawney bought the *Hispaniola* and prepared her for the voyage. He needed a good crew, and took on a one-legged sailor named Long John Silver as ship's cook. This man was very helpful to the Squire and picked out some tough men to work the ship. In a few weeks the *Hispaniola* was ready to sail away.

We set sail under our captain, Captain Smollett. I was ship's boy. The coxswain, Israel Hands, was an able man, and Long John Silver was a fine cook. He carried his crutch on a cord round his neck so that both his hands were free. He propped himself against the side and got on with his cooking like someone safe ashore. We all worked well and willingly, and I often heard the crew singing as they worked. The song was one I'd heard from old Billy Bones.

'Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest –
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!'

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I passed many spare moments in Silver's shining galley where his parrot, Captain Flint, swung in its cage. It was named after the pirate and all day long it screeched, 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! Pie ·es of eight!' Silver was interesting company, full of gripping yarns of other voyages and adventures. He was well-liked by all and the men looked on him as a leader.

On deck we kept a barrel of apples for the men to help themselves. One evening I went to the barrel and, finding it nearly empty, climbed inside to get an apple from the bottom. There I sat, quietly rocked by the sea. Someone sat down on the deck and leaned against the barrel and started to speak. The words I overheard made my blood run c ld. Israel Hands and Silver were planning to take over the ship once we had found the treasure. They would kill the captain and any of us who would not fall in with them! I could not believe my ears.

There was a sudden shout of 'Land-ho!' The men all ran to catch a first sight of land. I took the chance to jump out of the barrel and join the rest. Captain Smollett was telling the crew about the island. Long John Silver said that he'd been there before when his ship had put in for water. I looked at his smiling face and shuddered. I now knew

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that Silver was more than a cheerful ship's cook. He was also a bloodthirsty pirate! As soon as I could slip away I told the captain and my friends, the Squire and the doctor, what I had heard. They decided we were safe until the treasure was found. There were nineteen pirates, but only seven of us. When we were ready we would surprise them, and hope to win by catching them unprepared.

We now lay off Treasure Island. It looked a gloomy, forbidding place. The lower parts were wooded, with rocky peaks jutting above the trees. Even in the sunshine, with birds soaring above, I hated the thought of it. We were anchored in an inlet where trees came down to the water. The air was hot and still, and the men were restless and grumbling. Captain Smollett gave leave for the men to go ashore, which raised their spirits. I believe the silly fellows thought they would break their shins over treasure as soon as they landed. Long John Silver was in charge of the two boats taking thirteen men ashore. I knew I should not be needed on board and decided to go ashore too.

I ran up the beach into the woods, glad to be free and alone. I sat quietly hidden in the bushes. Hearing voices, I moved nearer to catch the words. I could see and hear Silver bullying a sailor to join the pirates. The

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sailor angrily refused. Silver's answer was to plunge his dagger into the man and leave him lying dead in the forest. I felt faint, and the whole world swam from me in a whirling mist. When I pulled myself together, Silver, crutch under his arm, was wiping his knife on a tuft of grass. I feared for my life if I should be found, and ran and ran, not caring where.

When I stopped I was at the foot of a stony hill. My eye was caught by a movement on the hillside. I could not tell if it was a man or an animal. Here was a new danger I felt I could not face, and I began to run towards the shore. But the creature was faster than me and, darting from tree to tree, he came closer. I could see now that it was a man, but so wild and strange that I was afraid. As he neared me he threw himself on the ground, and held up his hands as if begging for mercy.

My courage returned and I spoke to him. 'Who are you?' I asked.

'I'm poor Ben Gunn, I am,' he answered. 'It's three years since I spoke to anyone.' I had never seen such a ragged creature. He was dressed in a patchwork of odd clothes and goatskins, and his blue eyes looked startling in a face burned black by the sun.

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He told me he was rich, and babbled away in a high, squeaking voice. Sometimes he spoke sense and sometimes his words had no meaning. I felt he might be a little crazy after being alone so long. He said that he'd been on Captain Flint's pirate ship and that three years before he had come back with some seamen to look for Flint's treasure. When they could not find it the sailors went off, leaving him alone on the island. When he'd seen our ship he'd thought that Flint had returned.

I told him Flint was dead, but that some of Flint's old shipmates were among our crew. When I spoke of Silver, his face filled with terror. I told him we should have to fight the pirates, and he promised to help us if we would take him back home with us.

Our talk was interrupted by gunfire, and we ran towards the sound. Among the trees we came upon a high wooden fence which ran round a cleared space in the forest. I could see the Union Jack flying from a strong log-house in the clearing. I knew that my friends must have left the ship and were defending themselves in the log-house. The battle with the pirates had begun! The *Hispaniola* lay in the inlet with the Jolly Roger at her mast. On the beach a group of drunken sailors lolled on the sand.

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I parted from Ben Gunn and climbed the stockade to join my friends in the log-house. They were delighted to see me, for they had feared for my safety. Dr Livesey told me what had happened after I had left the ship. The captain had decided that the time had come to fight it out with the pirates. From Flint's treasure chart he knew about the log-house. Dr Livesey and one of our men had rowed ashore to find it. There was a fresh water spring by the house and the high fence made it a good place to defend. They then returned to the *Hispaniola* to collect the rest of the faithful crew. They had loaded a small boat with food and ammunition and made a dash for the shore.

There was a small group of pirates still on board the ship. When they saw what was happening they had opened fire on the little boat and it had sunk in shallow water. The Squire's party had waded ashore but lost half the stores and gunpowder. The doctor was sure the pirates would soon give up the fight. He said they would get ill from too much rum and with disease from their swampy camp-site.

I told my friends what had happened to me, and of my meeting with Ben Gunn. Dr Livesey wanted to know all about him, for we clearly needed help. The three leaders of

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our party were at their wits' end what to do. We had little food and the pirates could soon starve us out. I was worn out at the end of a hard day and soon fell asleep.

In the morning I awakened to the sound of bustling and voices. Long John Silver himself was approaching the stockade carrying a white flag. Captain Smollett suspected a trick and ordered us to be ready to fire. Silver said he had come to make terms to end the fighting. He was allowed to come inside the stockade. He threw his crutch over, got a leg up and cleverly dropped inside the clearing. He came and sat down outside the log-house, and told the captain that the pirates intended to get the treasure. He said that, in exchange for the treasure map, he would take us off the island to some safe place.

Captain Smollett was not the man to make terms with pirates. Angrily, he told Silver that he and the pirates were done for. Without the map they had no hope of finding the treasure. With or without the treasure, not one of them could plot a course to sail the ship home. He ordered Silver out of his sight. Fury blazed in Silver's eyes, and, with curses and threats, he disappeared into the wood.

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We now prepared for the coming attack, and sat and waited in the baking heat. Suddenly, musket shots hit the log-house, and pirates leapt from the woods and climbed the stockade. Shouts and groans, shots and flashes filled the air. I grabbed a cutlass and dashed outside to join in the fight. In moments we had fought them back. Those who were not killed or injured scampered to the woods for shelter. We ran back to the log-house to take stock. We knew there must be a second attack. We had lost two men and the captain was badly injured. We waited and watched, but all remained quiet.

In the lull, I saw Dr Livesey slip quietly out of the stockade. I guessed he was going to find Ben Gunn. Still no attack came and I grew weary of waiting. The heat, the blood and the dust made me restless and I longed to get away to a cool, fresh place. I knew the captain would never let me leave the stockade. When no one was looking I put two pistols in my pocket and slipped out.

I ran to the shore and felt the cool wind and watched the surf tumbling and tossing its foam along the beach. Climbing a hill, I could look down on the calm inlet where the *Hispaniola* lay on a flat sea. In a little

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boat beside her I could make out Long John Silver. He was talking and laughing with two men on the ship. No words reached me, but the screeching of Silver's parrot was carried on the wind. About sundown, Silver shoved off for the shore and the two men left on board went below deck. I was sure that if the pirates could not find the treasure they would sail away without us. A plan began to grow in my mind.

Ben Gunn had told me that he had made a boat and hidden it near the shore. If I could get to the *Hispaniola* I could cut her anchor ropes. She would drift away to another part of the shore and the pirates would be unable to escape from the island. I searched in the bushes and, to my joy, found the hidden boat. It was made of goatskin stretched over a wooden frame, and it was so flimsy I wondered if it was strong enough or big enough to hold me. With darkness, fog crept into the inlet. It was a perfect night for my plan. I pushed away from the shore and drifted silently towards the *Hispaniola*.

As I came alongside the ship I could hear loud, drunken voices. Israel Hands was shouting at another man. They were not only tipsy, it was plain they were also angry. On the shore I could see the glow of

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the fire in the pirates' camp. Someone there was singing the song I'd heard so often before –

'Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest –
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest –
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!'

Strand by strand, I cut the anchor rope and the ship began to swing and slide away to the open sea. As she slid past me I could see into the cabin. Israel Hands and the ship's watchman were fighting. They were too busy to feel the movement of the ship. I was in great danger and I lay flat in my little boat, praying I should not be seen.

For hours, it seemed, I was tossed on the waves and I must have slept, for it was broad daylight when I awakened. My boat had drifted along the coast but I could see no landing place under the rocky cliffs. I could only let my boat drift on and hope to find a sandy shore. The hot sun and the salt from the sea-spray had given me a raging thirst. I wanted to be on shore in the cool shade of the trees. As I rounded a headland the sight before me made me forget my cares. No more than half-a-mile away lay the *Hispaniola*! Her sails were set but, by the way she turned and drifted, it was clear no

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one was steering her. If the pirates were drunk and I could get aboard her, I might be able to capture the ship!

I paddled fast but with the wind filling her sails, the *Hispaniola* kept her lead. At last I had my chance. The breeze fell and she turned in the current and stopped. I came alongside and leapt aboard. The wind took her sails and she rushed down on a wave and sank my little boat. I had no way of escape now. I moved quietly on the deck among empty bottles. Not a soul was to be seen.

At length I saw two pirates. One was clearly dead, lying on the blood-stained deck. The other was Israel Hands, wounded and groaning and unable to stand. When he saw me he begged for brandy to ease his pain. I went below into the wrecked cabin to find some brandy and after a drink, Hands seemed stronger.

I agreed to give him food and to patch up his wounds if he would tell me how to steer the ship into a safe harbour. For the time being, he needed me to help him and I needed his help to save the ship. But I did not trust his odd smile as he craftily watched me. He asked me to fetch some wine from the cabin and when he thought I had gone

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below, he staggered painfully across the deck and picked up a knife which he hid in his jacket. This was all I needed to know. Israel was now armed and I knew he meant to kill me as soon as we had brought the ship ashore.

The beaching was difficult. It took all my care for I did not want to damage the ship and so I was too busy to keep watch on Hands all the time. Suddenly, I was aware of danger. Perhaps I had heard a creak or seen a shadow moving with the tail of my eye, but, sure enough, when I looked round, there was Hands already half-way towards me. A dagger was in his right hand. I dashed away and pulled a pistol from my pocket. Turning, I took aim and fired. There was no flash, no sound. The powder was wet with sea-water. The ship gave a sudden lurch as she hit the shore and we were both thrown off our feet. Before Hands could stand again, I had climbed the mast. Safe for the moment, I sat in the rigging and put dry powder in my pistols. Hands was slowly coming up the mast. His dagger between his teeth, he dragged himself after me.

'One more step, Mr Hands,' I called, 'and I'll blow your brains out!' He stopped and in a flash flung his dagger. I felt a sharp pain and found myself pinned to the mast by

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the shoulder. The sudden pain and shock made me fire both my pistols. With a cry, Israel Hands fell head first into the water. I felt sick and faint and shut my eyes until I became calm. When I had freed myself, I found that the wound was not very deep in spite of the blood that ran down my arm. In the cabin I found bandages to bind up my wound.

It was now sunset and I waded ashore. All I wanted was to be back with my friends. I hoped that the capture of the *Hispaniola* would be enough for them to forgive me for having left them. The moon helped me to find my way to the stockade. I walked carefully and silently and dropped over the fence. There was no sound. The man on watch had not heard me. I crept to the log-house and stepped inside. Suddenly a shrill voice rang out in the darkness. Flint's parrot screeched, 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!' Instead of finding my friends, I had come face to face with the pirates! By the light of a flaming torch I saw Silver and the five men who were still alive.

There was no sign of my friends, and my first thought was that they had all been killed. But I soon learned that this was not so.

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While I had been away, Dr Livesey had gone to the pirates and told them that, because the ship had gone, he and his party had given up the search for treasure. The log-house and everything in it, even the treasure chart, was handed over to the pirates and my friends had walked out into the woods.

This news puzzled me. I could not understand why they had given up without a fight.

Long John Silver was still the pirate leader, but he seemed less cheerful than before. It was clear that the men did not obey him willingly. If they should pick a new leader, Silver knew they would kill him. His only hope of being saved was to be on Captain Smollett's side.

He promised to protect me from the pirates if I would put in a good word for him with the captain. But if the pirates guessed he had changed sides, I knew they would finish us both. Our lives depended on keeping our plan secret.

The next morning, Dr Livesey came to the log-house to see to the sick and wounded. He was surprised to see me with the pirates but he said nothing. He went on his rounds giving out medicine and dressing wounds.

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When he had finished, he asked to speak to me alone. As fast as I could, I told the doctor of all that had happened to me. When he heard that the *Hispaniola* was safe his eyes opened wide in amazement. I told him of Silver's danger and he agreed to take him home with us if he would keep me safe. We were in a tight corner and it looked as though there was little hope of getting out of it. The doctor shook my hand and said he was off to get help.

By now, the pirates were growing restless to go out and find the treasure. But there was a question in Silver's mind. He asked himself why the treasure map should have been given to him, and he could think of no good answer. He knew that somewhere there was a trick, and he dared not let the pirates guess his thoughts. We sat round the fire eating breakfast. Silver chatted away, telling the pirates how rich they would all be once they had found the treasure. He painted such a picture that I thought he believed his own words.

We set out with picks and shovels to find Captain Flint's treasure. The men were armed to the teeth. Silver had two guns and a cutlass. As I was a prisoner, I had a rope tied round my waist and Long John held

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the other end. In spite of his promise to keep me safe, I did not trust him. As we went, the men talked about the chart. On the back of it was written :

"Tall tree, Spy-glass Shoulder,
bearing a point to the N. of
N.N.E.
Skeleton Island E.S.E. and by E.
Ten feet."

So we were looking for a tall tree on a hill. The men were in high spirits and Long John and I could not keep up with them. From time to time I had to help him when his crutch slipped on the stony hillside.

We had gone about half-a-mile when there was a shout from one of the men in front. The others ran towards him, full of hope. But it was not treasure he had found. At the foot of a tree lay a human skeleton. The silent men looked down in horror. The few rags of clothing that hung on the bones showed that the man had been a sailor. The skeleton was stretched out straight, the feet pointing one way and the arms, raised above the head, in the opposite direction. 'This here's one of Flint's little jokes!' cried Silver. 'These bones point E.S.E. and by E. This is one of the men he killed and he's laid him here to point the way!'

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The men felt a chill in their hearts, for they had all lived in fear of Flint. 'But he's dead,' said one of them. 'Ay, sure enough he's dead and gone below. But if ever a ghost walked, it would be Flint's.'

'Ay,' said another. 'I tell you, I don't like to hear "Fifteen Men" sung now, for it was the only song he ever sang.' Silver put an end to their talk and we moved on, but I noticed that now the men spoke softly and kept together. Even the thought of Flint was enough to fill them with terror. At the top of the hill we rested. In whispers, the men still talked of Flint.

'Ah, well,' said Silver, 'you praise your stars he's dead.'

Suddenly from the trees ahead, a thin, trembling voice struck up the well-known song:

'Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest –
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!'

The men were rooted to the spot. They stared in front of them in terror. Even Silver was shaking, but he was the first to pull himself together.

'I'm here to get that treasure!' he roared. 'I was never feared of Flint in his life and, by the Powers, I'll face him dead!'

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Long John Silver gave them all fresh heart and they picked up their tools and set off again. We soon saw ahead a huge tree that stood high above the others. The thought of what lay near that tree made the men's fears fade and they moved faster. Silver hobbled on his crutch. I could tell from the evil in his eyes that, if he got his hands on the gold, he would cut our throats and sail away.

The men now broke into a run, but not for long. They had come to the edge of a pit. In the bottom lay bits of wood and the broken handle of a pickaxe. It was clear for all to see that the treasure had gone! The pirates jumped down into the hole and began to dig with their hands. Silver saw his danger. He knew that they would turn on him at any moment.

'We're in a tight spot, Jim,' he whispered. The look of hate in his eyes had gone. With the pirates against him, he needed me again. Once more he had changed sides. The pirates scrambled out of the pit and stood facing Silver and me. The leader raised his arm to charge but before a blow was struck, three musket shots rang out and two pirates fell. The three men left ran for their lives. From out of the wood ran the doctor and Ben Gunn who had saved us in the nick of time.

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Silver and I were taken to Ben Gunn's cave where the rest of our party were waiting. It was a happy moment for me to see all my friends again. We now learned the answer to the question that had puzzled Silver and me. Dr Livesey had found out that Benn Gunn, alone on the island for so long, had discovered the treasure and taken it to his cave. The map was then useless. My friends were glad to move out of the log-house to the safety of Gunn's cave. That morning, Ben Gunn had watched from the woods as the pirates set out to seek for treasure. It was *his* voice that had struck chill into their hearts with his ghostly song!

That night, the captain, still weak from his wounds, Squire Trelawney, Dr Livesey and the rest of us, feasted and laughed and rested. Long John Silver, quietly smiling, became the polite and willing seaman I had first known.

The next day we started to load the treasure aboard the *Hispaniola* and in a few days were ready to sail. We knew there were three pirates still on the island and we left food and tools for them so that they could last until some ship would one day find them.

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And so we set sail. I cannot express the joy I felt to be turning my back on Treasure Island. We had not enough crew to sail the ship home and so we made for the nearest port in South America to get some extra men. We dropped anchor and went ashore, happy to be once again in a bright, busy place. It was nearly dawn when the doctor, the Squire and I returned to the *Hispaniola*. Ben Gunn met us and told us that Silver had left the ship. He had taken a small amount of the treasure and gone. We were all glad to be rid of him. Our one wish now was to reach Bristol safely.

We had a good voyage home. When we arrived, we shared out the treasure and settled back into our daily lives. Ben Gunn got a thousand pounds which he spent or lost in less than three weeks. The Squire gave him a little job in the village and he still sings in the church choir.

Long John Silver has gone right out of my life but sometimes, in a bad dream, I fancy I hear the screeching of his parrot, Captain Flint, 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!'



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The Three Musketeers

Alexandre Dumas



retold in simple language
by Joan Cameron

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The Three Musketeers

One morning in April, 1625, the little French town of Meung was in a state of great excitement. In those times, fighting was common in France. The King fought the ambitious Cardinal Richelieu, who wanted to be as powerful as the King himself. Noble families fought among themselves, and Spain was always ready to wage war. Few days passed without trouble in some town or another.

On this particular day, a crowd had gathered outside the Inn. The cause of all the stir was the arrival of a young man. He was riding the oddest horse the townspeople had ever seen. It looked so comical that many of them wanted to laugh. Only the length of the sword at the young man's side, and the proud gleam in his eye, stopped them from doing so.

The young man was called D'Artagnan. He was on his way to Paris, where he hoped to fulfil his dearest wish – to become a King's Musketeer. His father had given him a letter to

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Monsieur de Tréville, an old friend who was now Captain of the Musketeers.

As he dismounted, D'Artagnan caught sight of a gentleman with a scar on his temple sitting at the Inn's open window. He was talking to two others. They were laughing, and D'Artagnan was sure they were laughing at him.

This was more than he could bear.

'Tell me what you are laughing at, sir,' he called furiously. 'Then we will laugh together.'

'I was not speaking to you, sir.'

'Are you laughing at me?' demanded D'Artagnan, drawing his sword.

'I laugh as I please,' the man replied, turning away and re-appearing in the doorway.

Angrily, D'Artagnan lunged at him. Startled, the other man drew his sword. At the same moment, the innkeeper and several onlookers, anxious to prevent a fight, fell upon D'Artagnan. He was knocked senseless in the struggle, and carried indoors for attention. When the innkeeper returned, the gentleman with the scar asked how the young man was.

'He will soon recover,' replied the innkeeper. 'I don't know who he is, sir, but he carries a letter to Monsieur de Tréville in Paris.'

'Indeed!' The other man became alert. 'I would like to know what is in that letter. He is a nuisance, this young man. Please make out

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my bill. I am leaving. I must meet Milady and I do not wish her to be seen by him.'

Soon afterwards, partly recovered, D'Artagnan limped into the courtyard. The first thing he saw was the gentleman, talking to a beautiful young woman in a carriage.

'What are the Cardinal's orders?' she was asking.

'You must return at once to England. Keep watch on the Duke of Buckingham. As soon as he leaves London, inform the Cardinal. I am returning to Paris.'

D'Artagnan rushed forward.

'Stand and fight, sir!' he demanded. 'Would you dare run away from me in front of a woman?'

Seeing her companion lay his hand on his sword, Milady touched his arm.

'Remember, delay could ruin our plans.'

'You're right,' he agreed. 'Go on your way, and I will go on mine.'

With that, the carriage moved off, the driver cracking his whip. The gentleman jumped on his horse and galloped away in the opposite direction.

'Coward!' D'Artagnan called after him, but he was gone.

D'Artagnan was ready to leave for Paris when he found his letter to Monsieur de

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Tréville was missing.

'My letter! It's gone!'

The innkeeper hastened to protect himself.

'That gentleman must have taken it, sir. He showed great interest in it.'

The letter seemed to be gone for good. All D'Artagnan could do was hope Monsieur de Tréville would see him without it.

Monsieur de Tréville was a close friend of King Louis XIII. In those troubled times the ruler of France needed this brave man at his side. Tréville led the King's Musketeers, a band of bold men dedicated to protect their King.

Cardinal Richelieu, who had almost as much power in the country as the King himself, also had his own men – the Cardinal's Guards. He and the King constantly boasted to one another about their men's courage, and secretly encouraged them to fight.

Monsieur de Tréville's headquarters was always full of Musketeers. When D'Artagnan arrived, he made his way through them, his heart beating with excitement. He was allowed in to see Monsieur de Tréville, but had to wait. The Captain was scolding three of his men.

'Athos! Porthos! Aramis! I hear you were fighting in the streets and were arrested by the Cardinal's Guards. This will not do!'

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'But they attacked us!' they protested. 'We fought back, and escaped.'

'The Cardinal didn't tell me that,' murmured Monsieur de Tréville. 'However, I will not allow my men to risk their lives for nothing. The King needs his brave Musketeers. Now you may go, and I will see this young man.'

Eagerly, D'Artagnan explained who he was. Monsieur de Tréville smiled.

'I liked your father. What can I do for his son?'

D'Artagnan explained that he had come to Paris to join the Musketeers.

'That won't be possible right away,' the Captain told him. 'I'm afraid no one becomes a Musketeer without first serving in a less important regiment. But I will do this for you. I will send you to the Royal Academy, where you will learn horsemanship and swordsmanship. Let me know how you are getting on.'

Thanking Monsieur de Tréville, D'Artagnan left, excited over his good luck. On the way out he had the misfortune to meet, one after the other, the three Musketeers he had seen in the Captain's room. Still smarting from the scolding they had received, they took offence easily. D'Artagnan upset them all so much that he found himself facing three duels. The first was to be with Athos at noon, the second

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with Porthos at one o'clock, and the third with Aramis at two!

Dismayed, D'Artagnan said to himself: 'I can't draw back. But at least if I am killed, I shall be killed by a Musketeer!'

D'Artagnan knew no one in Paris. He went to meet Athos alone, determined to fight well. When Athos arrived, he brought the other two Musketeers with him. All three were astonished to see that it was the same young man they were to fight, one after the other.

'Now that you are here, gentlemen,' D'Artagnan said, 'I wish to apologise.'

At the word 'apologise' he saw contempt appear in their faces. They thought him a coward. His hot blood rose.

'You don't understand! I apologise only in case I am unable to fight all three of you. Monsieur Athos has the right to kill me first. And now – on guard!'

With the most gallant air possible, D'Artagnan drew his sword. Athos had just drawn his when a company of the Cardinal's Guards appeared.

'Sheathe your swords!' called Porthos and Aramis together, but it was too late.

'Fighting, Musketeers?' cried one of the Guards mockingly. 'You know that isn't allowed. Put up your swords. You're under arrest!'

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'Never!' called the three Musketeers. 'There may only be three of us, but we will fight.'

'You are wrong – there are four of us,' D'Artagnan said quietly. 'Try me.'

'What's your name, brave fellow?' asked Athos.

'D'Artagnan, monsieur.'

'Well, then, Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, forward!'

Swords clashed and men cried out as they fought fiercely to and fro. The Cardinal's Guards were also good swordsmen, but at last they were beaten off. Afterwards, the four returned to Monsieur de Tréville's headquarters, arm in arm.

D'Artagnan's heart swelled with pride. 'I am not yet a Musketeer, but at least I must be an apprentice.'

The affair caused a great fuss. Monsieur de Tréville scolded his Musketeers in public, but congratulated them in private. The King heard of it and was so impressed by D'Artagnan's bravery that he placed him as a cadet in the Guards of Monsieur d'Essart.

From then on D'Artagnan and the three Musketeers were the greatest of friends. D'Artagnan learned about life in Paris, and about the Court of King Louis XIII and the lovely Queen Anne. He was happy, and looked

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forward to the day when he too would become a Musketeer.

One day, while D'Artagnan was resting in his lodgings, his landlord, Monsieur Bonacieux, came upstairs to see him.

'I have heard you are a brave young man, D'Artagnan. I need help. Constance, my wife, has been kidnapped!'

'Kidnapped?'

'My wife is seamstress to the Queen,' Monsieur Bonacieux explained. 'She is more than that. She is one of the few people the Queen can trust.'

D'Artagnan had heard a great deal about the Queen. She was a lonely woman. Everyone knew that the King no longer loved her. The Cardinal had once cared for her, but she had rejected him. Now he plotted jealously against her. The English Duke of Buckingham, a powerful man in the government of his own country, had fallen deeply in love with her. But England and France were not friendly.

Monsieur Bonacieux sighed.

'I think my wife was kidnapped to see if she would tell the Queen's secrets. Only the other day she told me the Queen is frightened. She thinks the Cardinal has written to Buckingham in her name, to lure him to Paris and into a trap.'

'You think the Cardinal has taken your wife?'

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'I fear so,' replied Monsieur Bonacieux. 'One of his men was seen when she was carried off. He was a gentleman with a scar on his temple.'

D'Artagnan started up.

'That sounds like the man I met at Meung!' he exclaimed.

'Will you help me?' begged Monsieur Bonacieux. 'You are always with the Musketeers, who are enemies of the Cardinal. I thought you and your friends, while helping the Queen, would be glad to spoil his plans.'

'I will do what I can,' D'Artagnan agreed. 'And if the man who carried off your wife is the man I think he is, I will be revenged for what happened to me at Meung!'

D'Artagnan lost no time in telling Athos, Porthos and Aramis of the disappearance of Constance Bonacieux.

'This woman is in trouble because of her loyalty,' he told them. 'I am also anxious about the Queen's safety.'

'I have heard people say she loves our enemies, the Spanish and the English,' said Athos.

'Spain is her own country,' D'Artagnan reminded him. 'It is only natural that she should love the Spanish. As for the English – only one Englishman is involved, Buckingham, the King of England's chief minister. Now the

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Cardinal and his men seem to be using his admiration for the Queen in some wicked plot.'

The Cardinal was their true enemy, the friends agreed. If they could spoil his plans, it would be worth risking their heads. The missing Constance Bonacieux was the key to the whole intrigue. She must be found, and they would do it together.

The four men stretched out their hands and shouted in one voice:

'All for one, and one for all!'

D'Artagnan's task was to keep watch on Monsieur Bonacieux's apartments from his own room on the upper floor. Monsieur Bonacieux had been arrested, and the Cardinal's Guards were using his house as a trap. Anyone arriving there was taken away for questioning to see what they knew of the Queen's affairs.

Late one night, D'Artagnan heard cries from downstairs. Realising it was a woman's voice, he drew his sword and rushed to the rescue. The woman was Constance Bonacieux herself! She had escaped, and returned home. The Cardinal's men had followed her, but surprised by D'Artagnan's attack, they ran away.

''Thank you for saving me!'' cried Constance Bonacieux. ''Now I must go – there is something I have to do for the Queen.''

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A few hours later, D'Artagnan was astonished to see her in a dark street. She was with a Musketeer who looked like Aramis. What were they doing? D'Artagnan hurried up to speak to them, and found the man was a stranger, disguised in a Musketeer's uniform. He was the English Duke of Buckingham! Constance Bonacieux was taking him to a secret meeting at the Louvre with the Queen.

'Please don't give us away,' Madame Bonacieux begged. 'You can ruin us all.'

D'Artagnan shook the Duke's hand.

'I will make sure you reach the Louvre safely.'

At the Louvre, Madame Bonacieux led the Duke into a quiet drawing room. Buckingham had come to Paris in answer to a message, supposed to be from the Queen. On his arrival in the city, he had learned the message was a trap, set by the Cardinal.

Although the English Duke knew he was in danger, he refused to return to London without seeing the Queen. He waited, unafraid, while the trusted Constance Bonacieux brought her mistress to see him.

Buckingham turned as the Queen came into the room, her lovely face pale. She implored the Duke to return to England and safety. She made him promise not to see her secretly again. It was too dangerous.

'Come as an ambassador, with guards to

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defend you,' she said. 'Then I will know you are safe.'

'Very well,' Buckingham agreed. 'Please give me something of yours, perhaps a ring or a chain. I will wear it to remember you.'

Queen Anne thrust a rosewood casket into his hands.

'Take this, and go, before it is too late!'

Unknown to the Queen, Cardinal Richelieu was soon to know about her secret meeting with Buckingham. The news was brought to him by the Comte de Rochefort, the very man who had so annoyed D'Artagnan at Meung. An agent of the Cardinal, he had placed a spy in the Queen's household.

'The Queen and Buckingham have met,' he told the Cardinal. 'He has already left for England.'

'Then our plan has failed,' said the Cardinal, angrily.

'The Queen gave Buckingham a gift,' Rochefort went on. 'It was a box containing the twelve diamond studs the King gave her on her birthday.'

'Well, well!' The Cardinal smiled suddenly. 'All is not lost.'

He sat down and wrote a letter. Closing it with his seal, he sent for a servant.

'Take this at once to London,' he ordered. 'Stop for no one.'

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The letter said:

'Milady de Winter – be at the first Ball Buckingham attends. He will wear on his doublet twelve diamond studs. Cut off two of these. As soon as you have them, inform me.'

King Louis XIII was next to know about Buckingham's visit, for the Cardinal told him himself. The King demanded to know why Buckingham had come.

'No doubt to conspire with your enemies,' replied the Cardinal.

'He came to see the Queen!' insisted the King, furiously.

'I am unwilling to think so,' said the Cardinal. He knew how suspicious the King was of his wife. 'But I have heard she cried this morning, and spent the day writing letters.'

'I must have these letters!' cried the King.

He immediately sent the Chancellor to search the Queen's rooms, but the only letters he found were to the Queen's own brother. They attacked the Cardinal's power in France, but did not mention Buckingham. The King was delighted.

'I was wrong, Cardinal,' he admitted. 'The Queen is true to me.'

The Cardinal bowed his head.

'Perhaps you should do something to please her, sire. Give a Ball. The Queen loves

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dancing. It would be a chance for her to wear those beautiful diamonds you gave her for her birthday.'

The Queen was surprised and happy when the King told her about the Ball. She asked eagerly when it was to be held. The King told her the Cardinal would arrange everything. Every day for more than a week, however, the Cardinal made some excuse for not setting the date.

On the eighth day he received a letter from Milady de Winter in London. It read: 'I have them. Please send money and I will bring them to Paris.'

The Cardinal knew that Milady could be there in ten to twelve days. Content that his plans were going well, he spoke to the King about the Ball.

'Today is September 20th. I have arranged that the Ball will take place in the Hôtel de Ville on October 3rd. And do not forget, sire, to remind the Queen to wear the diamond studs!'

The Queen was delighted when Louis told her the Ball would soon take place. But her delight soon turned to shock.

'I wish you to appear in your most beautiful gown,' he told her, 'wearing the diamond studs I gave you for your birthday.'

The Queen stared at the King.

'When is the Ball?' she asked faintly.

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'The Cardinal has arranged it for October 3rd,' replied the King. At the sound of that name, Queen Anne grew pale.

'Was it also his idea that I should wear the diamond studs?'

'What if it was?' demanded the King. 'Do I ask too much?'

The Queen shook her head. 'No, sire.'

'Then you will appear as I ask?'

'Yes, sire.'

Once the King had gone, Queen Anne sank into a chair in despair.

'I am lost,' she murmured. 'The Cardinal must know everything. What am I to do?'

And she began to weep.

'Don't cry, your Majesty.'

The Queen turned sharply around, for she thought she was alone. It was Constance Bonacieux, who had heard everything.

'Don't be afraid,' she told the Queen. 'We will get those diamonds back in time for the Ball!'

Constance Bonacieux knew her husband would not help. The Cardinal had released him, and given him money. He was now a Cardinal's man. There was one person who could help – D'Artagnan. She told him wha had happened, first swearing him to secrecy

'I will go to London at once,' he told her.

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Realising not a moment was to be lost, D'Artagnan went to see Monsieur de Tréville. He asked if he could arrange leave of absence for him.

'I must go to London,' he explained. 'I am on a secret mission for the Queen.'

Monsieur de Tréville looked sharply at the eager young man.

'Will anyone try to prevent you?'

'The Cardinal would if he knew,' D'Artagnan admitted.

'Then you must not go alone,' said Monsieur de Tréville. 'Athos, Porthos and Aramis will go with you. Then surely one of you at least will get through to London.'

'Thank you,' D'Artagnan said, gratefully.

Athos, Porthos and Aramis were as excited as D'Artagnan himself when he explained their mission.

The four adventurers left Paris at two o'clock in the morning. As long as it remained dark, they kept silent. In spite of themselves, they expected ambushes on every side. With the sunrise, their spirits rose.

All went well until they arrived at Chantilly, early in the morning. They stopped at an inn for breakfast. After the meal, the first sign of danger appeared. A stranger who had shared their table called on Porthos to drink the Cardinal's health. Porthos agreed, if the other

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would then drink the health of the King. The stranger cried that he would drink to no one but the Cardinal. A bitter argument followed. Leaving Porthos to settle it, the others hurried on their way.

They had travelled for several hours when they came upon men mending the road. As they drew level, the workmen drew out concealed muskets.

'It's an ambush!' cried D'Artagnan. 'Ride on!'

They spurred their horses forward, but Aramis was wounded in the shoulder. He was able to travel only a little further. Athos and D'Artagnan had to leave him to be looked after at a village inn.

Only D'Artagnan and Athos were left. They rode on. At nightfall they took a room at Amiens. The night passed quietly enough, but when Athos went to pay the bill in the morning, the landlord accused him of using forged money. Four armed men rushed in. They had obviously been waiting.

'Ride on, D'Artagnan!' shouted Athos, drawing his sword.

D'Artagnan did not need to be told twice. He galloped on. At length, his horse exhausted, he reached Calais, the port for ships bound for England. He ran on to the quay. There, a travel-weary gentleman was telling a ship's captain that he must go to

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England. The ship was ready to sail, the captain explained, but the Cardinal had just issued an order. No ship was to leave without his permission.

'I already have it,' the gentleman said, showing a paper. 'Will you take me?'

The captain agreed, but insisted that the pass had to be signed by the Port Governor. Hearing this, D'Artagnan hurried away and waited amongst some trees for the gentleman to come back with the signed pass. He had to have the Cardinal's pass. Naturally, the man refused to give it up, and D'Artagnan had to fight him for it. They fought fiercely for some time before the man at last gave in and handed over the precious piece of paper.

Breathing hard, D'Artagnan thrust the pass into his pocket and went to find a ship to take him to England.

The ship D'Artagnan chose had scarcely left harbour when a cannon boomed out. The port had been closed. He had only just been in time. Worn out, D'Artagnan slept while the ship sailed across the Channel. In the morning, he watched eagerly while the vessel dropped anchor in Dover. Soon he was on his way to London.

The young Frenchman knew no English, but he had the Duke of Buckingham's name written on a piece of paper. He was soon directed to the Duke's home, for everyone in London knew him. When he heard that

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D'Artagnan had come, the Duke saw him at once. He remembered him from their meeting in the dark streets of Paris.

His face became grave when D'Artagnan told him of the Queen's danger.

'We must return the diamond studs to her. Louis must not find out she gave them to me!' he exclaimed. He unlocked the box in which they lay, with a key from a chain he wore round his neck. As he lifted the diamonds out, he gave a startled cry.

'Two of them are missing!'

'Can you have lost them, my lord?' D'Artagnan asked anxiously.

'They have been stolen,' the Duke replied grimly. He showed D'Artagnan where the ribbon holding the two missing studs had been cut.

'Wait!' said the Duke. 'I remember now. I wore them only once, at a Ball in London. Milady de Winter was there. She has never liked me, but she was unusually friendly. I wondered why. She must have taken them. She must be an agent of the Cardinal.'

He paced up and down, thinking. The Ball, D'Artagnan told him, was in five days' time. If Queen Anne appeared with two of the diamond studs missing, the King's anger would be terrible. The Cardinal would have succeeded. The Duke stopped suddenly and turned to the young Frenchman.

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'Five days – that's all the time we need!' he exclaimed. 'I know what we must do.'

Buckingham sent for his secretary, and issued an immediate order. No ships were to sail for France, for he believed Milady de Winter was still in London. Such was his importance in the government that the order was carried out without question.

Next the Duke called for his jeweller, and showed him the set of diamond studs. He promised the man he would pay him well to make two studs exactly like them. They must be finished within two days, and made so that no one could tell the new from the old. The jeweller agreed, and hurried away to start work.

'We are not beaten, D'Artagnan!' cried the Duke.

Two days later the new studs were ready. The Duke and D'Artagnan examined them carefully. They had been so well made it was impossible to tell they were not part of the original set. Now D'Artagnan could leave for France.

As his ship left Dover, he thought he saw Milady de Winter aboard one of the vessels which had not been allowed to leave port. His ship passed so quickly he had little more than a glimpse of her. Once across the Channel he set off for Paris as fast as he could.

Paris was full of talk about the Ball, at

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which the King and Queen would lead the dancing. More than a week had been spent in preparing the Hôtel de Ville, with flowers and hundreds of candles. The King arrived to the cheers of the watching crowds. Soon afterwards the Queen also entered the ballroom. The Cardinal watched from behind a curtain. A smile of triumph came to his lips. She was not wearing the diamond studs. He was quick to point this out to the King.

'Madame, why are you not wearing the diamond studs?' the King demanded.

The Queen looked round, and saw the Cardinal.

'Sire, I was afraid they would be damaged in this crowd. I will send for them.'

While the Queen waited with her ladies in a side room, the Cardinal gave the King the box containing the two studs Milady de Winter had stolen from Buckingham.

'Ask the Queen where these two diamond studs have come from,' he suggested.

His triumph turned to rage when the Queen re-appeared, proudly wearing the set of diamond studs. All twelve were there!

'What does this mean?' the King asked, puzzled, pointing to the two the Cardinal had given him. The Cardinal thought quickly.

'I wished her Majesty to have them as a

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present. Not daring to offer them myself, I adopted this plan.'

'I must thank you, your Eminence,' said the Queen. Her smile showed she had understood the Cardinal's plot. 'I am sure these two must have cost you as much as all the others cost the King.'

D'Artagnan had watched the Queen's triumph over the Cardinal. Apart from the King, the Cardinal and the Queen herself, he was the only one in the crowded ballroom who had understood what was happening.

Later, the Queen sent for him. She thanked him, and gave him a diamond ring. D'Artagnan put it on and returned to the gaiety of the Ball. He was well content. He was in favour with the King and Monsieur de Tréville, and had helped his Queen when she most needed it. Above all, he had gained the friendship of three brave men, Athos, Porthos and Aramis. One day, he too would be a Musketeer, just like them.



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A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens



retold in simple language
by Joan Collins

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A Christmas Carol

The man who hated Christmas

This story begins just after Queen Victoria came to the throne. Jacob Marley had been dead for seven years. His business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, was the meanest man in London.

Scrooge was so mean he would not even pay for a coat of paint to remove Marley's name from the office sign. It still read, *"Scrooge and Marley."*

It was a cold, foggy Christmas Eve, and a small boy with a bright red nose bent down to the keyhole to sing a carol:

"God rest you merry, gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge rushed out with a long wooden ruler, to take a crack at the boy's head, but he scurried off. Scrooge hated Christmas and everything to do with it. He was a mean, close-fisted old miser, who never did a kind action or gave a penny away.

He looked as if the cold had got right inside

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him. His thin lips were blue. His nose looked shrivelled and nipped. His eyebrows, wiry hair and stubbly chin looked silver with frost.

But his heart was the coldest of all. It made his office chilly, even in summer. At Christmas the temperature was freezing. He only had a tiny fire and kept the coal bucket by his desk. His clerk could not fetch a fresh piece of coal without asking.

His clerk's name was Bob Cratchit. He sat perched on a high stool in the outer office, writing in a huge account-book.

He wore mittens, but his fingers were so cold he could hardly hold his quill pen. The ink was freezing in his ink-well. He wore a long scarf he called his "comforter", wrapped three times round his neck for warmth. His wife had knitted it, for Bob could not afford an overcoat. Scrooge only paid him fifteen shillings a week.

Even Scrooge's name sounded mean – EBENEZER SCROOGE!

People were going past in the foggy London streets, coughing and wheezing. The air was smoky, so it was dark, even though it was only three o'clock in the afternoon. Scrooge could hardly see the houses opposite, and candles were lit in all the City offices. Bob Cratchit tried to warm his hands at his candle-flame, with little success.

Although it was so dark and foggy,

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everyone was cheerful. Tomorrow was Christmas Day and the shops were full of Christmas good cheer, and blazing with lights. There were turkeys and geese, piles of oranges and apples, nuts, cakes and sweets – but not everybody had the money to buy them.

Some ragged boys clustered round a roaring fire in an iron brazier, at the corner of the dark street. It had been lit by workmen.

Suddenly Scrooge's office door opened and a cheery voice cried, "Merry Christmas, Uncle!"

It was Scrooge's nephew, Fred. He was glowing red in the face, from walking quickly. His eyes sparkled, and his breath was like smoke in the cold air.

"Bah!" said Scrooge. "Humbug! What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough!"

His nephew laughed. "What reason have you to be miserable? You're rich enough!"

"Merry Christmas!" growled Scrooge. "Down with Christmas! If I had my way, every idiot that goes about saying 'Merry Christmas' should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!"

"You don't mean that, I'm sure, Uncle! Come and have Christmas dinner with us tomorrow and let's be friends!"

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But Scrooge refused.

"I'm going to wish you a Merry Christmas in spite of your bad temper, Uncle. *And* a Happy New Year!"

"Bah!" Scrooge snapped as his nephew went out, with a friendly word to Bob Cratchit as he left.

As Fred went out of the door, he stood back to let in two plump, pleasant-faced gentlemen. They were collecting money for the poor: to give them a bit of comfort at Christmas time.

"Mr Marley?"
asked one of them.

"Marley's dead. I'm Scrooge!"
barked Ebenezer.

He refused to give anything to the collection. "Are there no prisons?" he demanded. "Are there no workhouses? I support those with my taxes. Let the poor go there!"

"Many can't go there, and many would rather die!"

"Let them die, then!" said Scrooge. "There are far too many poor people!"

The gentlemen went away, disappointed.

The fog got deeper and the afternoon darker. Soon it was time to shut the office. Bob put out his candle.

"I suppose you want the day off,

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tomorrow," grumbled Scrooge. "I shall have to pay you a whole day's wages for no work!"

"It's only once a year," said Bob, timidly.

"And that's once too often!" growled Scrooge, but he had to let the clerk go

Bob ran off, like a lad let out of school, in his white comforter. He slid down a frozen hill twenty times, at the end of a line of boys. Then he hurried home to play Blind Man's Buff with his family.

Scrooge ate a lonely supper in a miserable inn, and read the financial papers.



Marley's Ghost

Scrooge lived alone in rooms in a gloomy old house that had belonged to Jacob Marley, his old partner. It was so dark in the yard that Scrooge had to feel his way up to the gatepost. He was putting his key in the door when he noticed the knocker. It was a big old-fashioned one, with nothing special about it. But tonight it was different. It was not an ordinary knocker at all! It was MARLEY'S FACE!

Marley's face was a dismal shade of green, rather like bad fish glowing in the dark.

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Ghostly spectacles were perched on its ghostly forehead, and its hair moved gently, as if a breeze were stirring it. Its eyes had a fixed stare. As Scrooge looked hard at it, it turned back into a knocker again!

Scrooge was not frightened. He did not believe in ghosts. He entered the house, lighted his candle and looked at the inside of the door. He expected to see the back of Marley's head, with its old-fashioned pig-tail, but there were only screws and nuts.

He banged the door and went up the wide staircase. Was something going up ahead of him? He told himself firmly that Marley had been dead for seven years.

Upstairs everything was as usual. There was nothing under the bed, or under the table. A little saucepan of porridge was on the hob, by a small coal fire. Scrooge put on his slippers, dressing-gown and night-cap and sat down to eat his porridge. But first he made sure the door was locked.

There were pictures of Bible characters on the tiles around the fireplace – Cain and Abel, the Queen of Sheba, Abraham and Isaac. They all looked like Jacob Marley to him.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge.

Just then a bell high above the fireplace began to swing to and fro. It had not been used for years. Now it began to ring, and

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every bell in the house rang loudly for about a minute.

Then came a clanking noise, deep in the house, as if someone were dragging a heavy chain up from the cellar

"It's humbug!" cried Scrooge. "I won't believe it!"

But the cellar door opened and the noise came up the stairs, through the heavy door and into the room, before his very eyes.



The flame in the fire leaped up as if it cried; "I *know* him! MARLEY'S GHOST!"

And there was Marley, with his pig-tail, wearing his usual waistcoat, tight trousers and boots. The chain around his waist was very long and wound around him like a tail. It was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, account books and heavy metal purses. Scrooge could see right through his body to the two buttons on his coat behind.

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"You don't believe in me, do you?" said the Ghost.



"I don't," said Scrooge. "You could be the result of an upset stomach. Perhaps you're an undigested bit of beef, or a crumb of cheese!"

The Ghost took no notice of Scrooge's feeble joke. Instead it gave a frightful cry and rattled its chain.

"What is that chain you are wearing?" asked Scrooge.

"I made this chain in life, link by link and yard by yard. You have one too, just as heavy and thick as mine. But you have had seven years more, so yours is much longer."

Scrooge looked down at himself, but could not see anything.

"I only thought about money. I lost so many chances to do good," sighed the Ghost.

"But you were a good business man, Jacob!"

"Business! Human beings were my business! I neglected them, and now I'm being punished for it!"

"Why have you come to me?" asked Scrooge.

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"To warn you, so that you can escape my fate. You are going to be visited by three Spirits, who will come to you as the church clock strikes one."

"I'd much rather they didn't!" said Scrooge.

But the Ghost wrapped its tail round its arm and walked backwards towards the window, which began to open wide. The Ghost floated out into the night air. Scrooge heard sad cries, and saw that the sky was full of figures like Marley. They were crying out sadly and trying to reach the suffering human beings they had not helped while they were alive.

Suddenly Scrooge felt very tired. He crept into bed, and fell asleep right away.



The Spirit of Christmas Past

Scrooge woke up with a start when the church bell chimed midnight. Was it a dream or was a spirit really going to appear to him at one o'clock? He lay awake listening, until at last the bell boomed out, "ONE".

The lights all flashed up in his room and the curtains on his four-poster bed were drawn.

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There stood a strange small figure, with a smooth face like a child, but with long white hair, like an old man. It wore a white tunic and held a branch of holly in its hand. A bright clear light shone from the top of its head. It carried a cap like a fire extinguisher, which it could use to put out this light.

"Who or what are you?" asked Scrooge.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long past?"

"No, *your* past."

"What brings you here?"

"To remind you. To help you. Get up and come with me!"

Scrooge got out of bed in his night-clothes and took the Spirit's hand.

They were suddenly in the country, in a small market town. Boys were riding along the road. Some were on ponies, some in farmers' carts, and they were all calling to one another excitedly. They were going home for the Christmas holidays. Scrooge knew who they were – his old school friends.

He began to cry. He remembered how he had been left behind that Christmas, in a cold cheerless schoolroom, forgotten by everybody. He could see himself as a boy, sitting reading. Behind him, outside the window, the people in the book came to life.

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"There's Robinson Crusoe with his parrot, and Man Friday running along the sandy beach!" Scrooge called out excitedly. But the pictures faded. He dried his eyes on his sleeve

"I wish –" he said.

"What?" asked the Ghost.

"There was a boy singing carols outside my office tonight. I wish I'd given him something."

The Spirit waved its hand.

"Let's look at another Christmas."

It was the same schoolroom. The boy was older, alone again. Suddenly the door opened and a little girl rushed in and hugged him. It was his sister. She'd been sent to bring him home for Christmas.

"She was never strong. She died young," said Scrooge.

"And left one child, I believe," said the Spirit. "Your nephew."

"Yes," said Scrooge, thoughtfully.

Then they left the school behind, and found themselves in a huge city. It was Christmas Eve and the streets were lit up. They stopped at a warehouse door.

"Do you know it?"

"Know it! I was apprenticed here!" said Scrooge excitedly.

There was a jolly party in full swing. Old

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Fezziwig, Scrooge's employer, was celebrating Christmas with his family and work-people. There was a splendid supper: a great piece of Cold Roast, a great piece of Cold Boiled, mincepies, cake and beer. Best of all, there was a fiddler who played for country dancing!

Mr and Mrs Fezziwig were the 'top couple' in *Sir Roger de Coverley*. Old Fezziwig seemed to be everywhere at once, winking with his legs, and Mrs Fezziwig kept up with him! Scrooge was delighted. He enjoyed it all as much as he had all those years ago. At the end, he looked up at the Spirit.

"Is anything the matter?"

"No," said Scrooge. "I just wished I could say a word to my clerk, that's all."

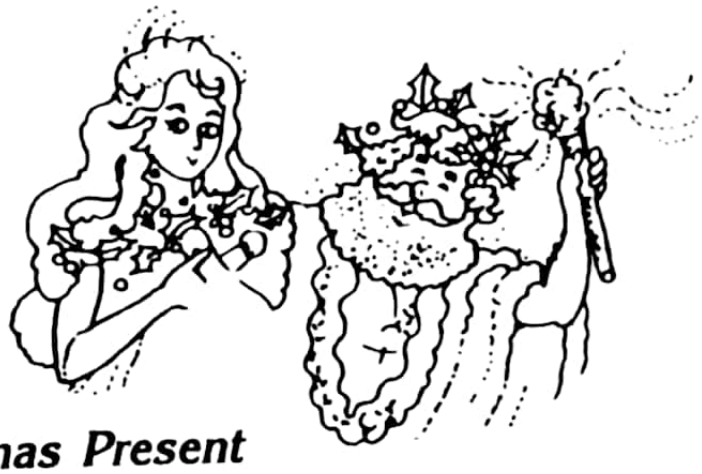
The next picture was not so cheerful. Scrooge was older and looked meaner. He was talking with his sweetheart. She told him he cared more about money than about her, and gave him back his engagement ring.

Scrooge was upset. Next, he saw his sweetheart happily married to someone else, while he sat alone in his office, with only a candle for company.

"Take me away!" he cried out, and struggled with the Spirit. He tried to press down the cap on the light of Memory that shone from its head. Suddenly, he was in his own bedroom. He fell on his bed, and sank into a deep sleep.

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The Spirit of Christmas Present

Scrooge woke again with a jump, just as the clock was striking One. A blaze of light seemed to be coming from the room next door.

He heard a voice calling him: "Come in, Scrooge!"

He put on his slippers and shuffled to the door. His room looked quite different. It was decorated with holly, ivy and mistletoe, and there was a huge crackling fire in the grate. Heaped up on the floor to make a kind of throne he saw turkeys, geese, chickens, joints of beef, strings of sausages, mincepies, Christmas puddings and pyramids of fruit.

On top of them sat a jolly Giant, holding a torch shaped like a Horn of Plenty. He held it up to shine its light on Scrooge as he came peering round the door.

"Come in, man, and get to know me!" said the Giant. "I am the Ghost of Christmas Present!"

The Spirit was dressed in a deep green robe,

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edged with white fur and wore a holly wreath on its brown curly hair.

"Spirit," said Scrooge humbly, "I know you have come to do me good. Please take me with you!"

The Spirit took him out into the streets, where people were doing their last-minute shopping, getting ready for Christmas. The bells rang out for the services, from church and chapel. Poor people, who could not afford the fuel to cook at home, were carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The Spirit stood in a doorway and sprinkled a few drops from his torch, in blessing, on these poor folk's dinners.

They came to a very small house. It belonged to Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's clerk. He only earned fifteen shillings a week, yet the Ghost of Christmas Present gave his house a special blessing.

The Cratchits were all dressed up in honour of Christmas. Mrs Cratchit and her daughters had shabby dresses, but they had decked them up with gay ribbons. Young Peter was wearing his father's starched "wing" collar, a lot too big for him, and getting the corners in his mouth. He was sticking a fork into a bubbling saucepan of potatoes, while one of the girls was laying the table.

Two excited little Cratchits, a boy and a girl rushed in to say they were sure they could

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smell *their* goose cooking at the baker's!

"Where's your father and Tiny Tim?" asked Mrs Cratchit.

"Here they come!" said the children. And Bob, with three feet of 'comforter' around his neck and Tiny Tim on his shoulder, came round the door. Tiny Tim carried a crutch and had an iron frame on his leg.

Just then the young Cratchits came charging back, bearing the goose on a tray! Mrs Cratchit hotted up the gravy. Young Peter mashed the potatoes. The girls dished up the apple sauce and put out the hot plates. Everyone sat round the table, and Bob said grace. Then Mrs Cratchit plunged her long carving knife into the breast, and the smell of sage and onion stuffing gushed out!

They all said there never was such a tender, tasty goose! There was enough for everybody. The two young Cratchits, who were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows, couldn't have eaten any more anyway.

Next, it was the turn of the Christmas pudding, which had been boiling away in the kitchen copper. The room smelled like a wash-day and baking day combined! Mrs Cratchit carried in the pudding, blazing with brandy, and with a sprig of holly on top. It looked like a speckled football. (No one even dared to hint that it was rather a small pudding for such a big family!)

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Then they all sat round the fire, eating roast chestnuts and drinking Christmas toasts.

Bob raised his glass (a custard cup without a handle.) "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dear! God bless us!" And Tiny Tim added: "God bless us, every one!" He sat close to his father, who held his thin little hand.

"Spirit," whispered Scrooge, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see an empty chair," said the Spirit, "and beside it a little crutch. If these shadows do not change, Tiny Tim will not see another Christmas. But why should you care? Let him die. There are too many poor people."

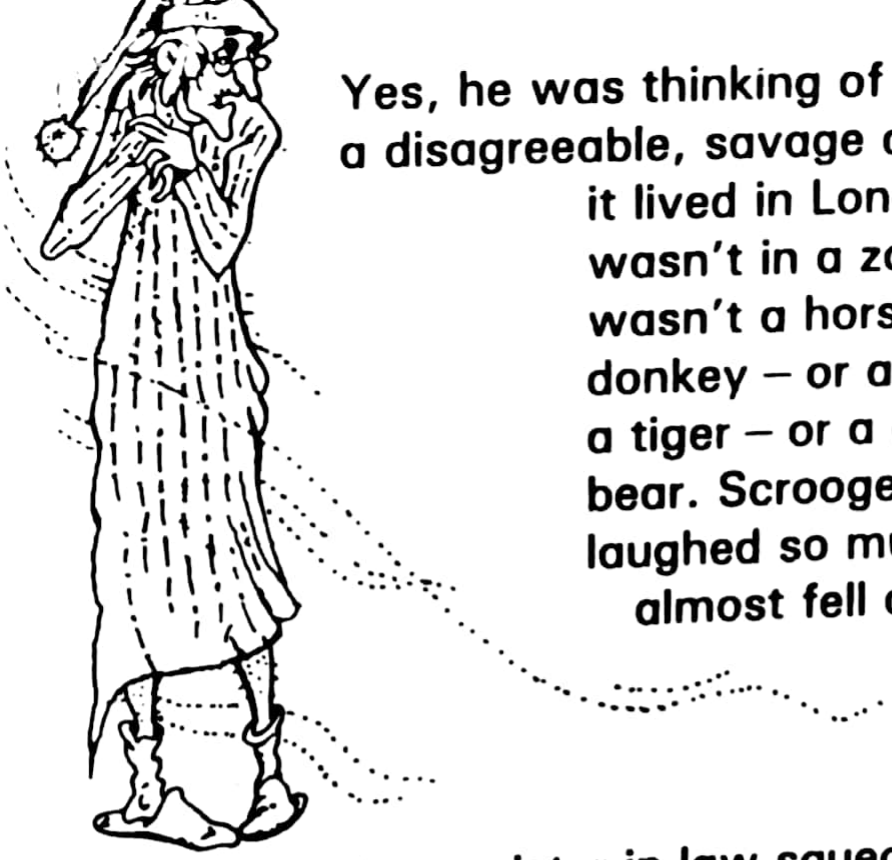
Scrooge heard his own words, and was silent with shame.

Then the Spirit showed Scrooge what Christmas meant in far-away, lonely places. To miners below the earth. To men in lighthouses, surrounded by sea and storm. To sailors on board ship in the dark night, singing carols as they worked.

Suddenly Scrooge heard a jolly laugh. It was Fred, his nephew. They were having a Christmas party. After a hilarious game of Blind Man's Buff, they were playing a guessing game, "Yes and No." Fred had to think of something, and could only answer "Yes" or "No" to questions.

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Yes, he was thinking of an animal – a disagreeable, savage animal. Yes, it lived in London. No, it wasn't in a zoo. No, it wasn't a horse – or a donkey – or a cow – or a tiger – or a cat – or a bear. Scrooge's nephew laughed so much he almost fell off the sofa.

At last his plump sister-in-law squealed out, "I know who it is! It's your Uncle Scroo-oo-ge!"

And so it was! They all drank a toast to Uncle Scrooge, who would have answered them, but the Spirit took him away again to see other people's Christmases in distant lands.

But gradually the Spirit grew smaller and smaller. Its brown hair turned to grey.

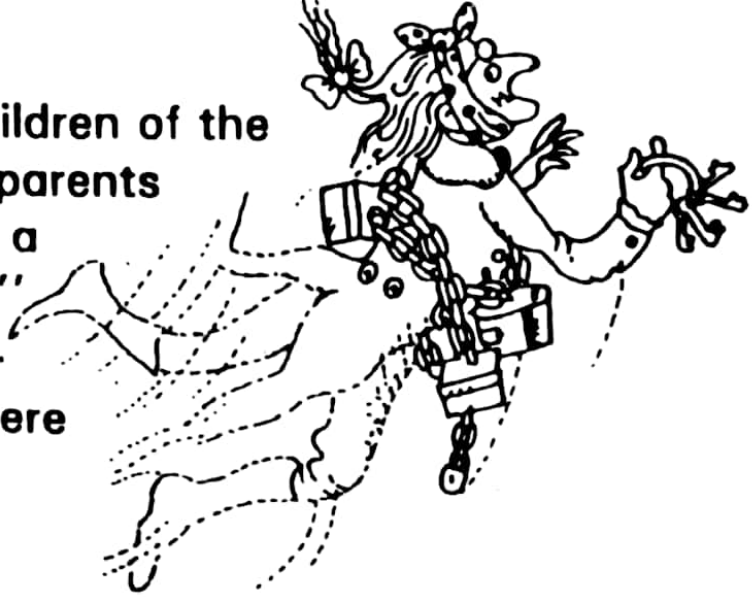
"Is your life so short?" asked Scrooge.

"Yes. It ends at midnight."

Then Scrooge noticed something hiding in the folds of the Spirit's robe. There were two children there, a boy and a girl, very thin, half-starved and ragged.

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"These are the children of the world who have no parents and no one to make a Christmas for them," said the Spirit sadly.

"Have they nowhere to go?" asked Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The clock struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Spirit, but it was gone. Instead, he saw a solemn figure, clad in a dark hood and cloak, gliding like a mist over the ground towards him. It was the last of the Spirits.



The Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come

The Spirit did not speak. All Scrooge could see of it in the gloom was one outstretched hand, pointing from its black garments. Scrooge was filled with fear.

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"Are you the Spirit of the Future?" he asked, trembling. "Are you going to show me things that are going to happen in years to come?"

The Spirit seemed to bend its head.

"Will you not speak to me?" begged Scrooge.

Instead, the Spirit pointed straight ahead.

They were in the City. The business men were standing in groups, chinking the gold coins in their pockets. Scrooge and the Spirit stopped near enough to hear what some of them were saying.

"I don't know much about it. I only know he's dead," said one fat merchant.

"Who's he left all his money to?" asked another, taking snuff out of a large snuff-box.

"I don't know," said a red-faced banker with a wart on his nose. "He hasn't left it to *me*!" They all laughed.

"I wonder who'll go to his funeral," said the fat man. "He hadn't any friends!"

Scrooge wondered who they were talking about. He looked about for himself, but he was not in his usual place of business.

Next the Spirit took Scrooge to a dreadful slum in the poorest part of London. Under a low roof there stood a shabby old second-hand shop, full of rubbish. A rag-and-bone man was crouching by an evil-smelling stove,

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waiting for customers.

Two men and a woman came in out of the murky night, carrying bundles. They had some bedding, clothes and old curtains for sale.

"Where'd you get these, then?" croaked the rag-and-bone merchant, picking them over.

"The old chap we took them from won't want them again!" chuckled the woman.

"No, where he's gone, he won't want no sheets or nightshirt!" said the other man.

"If he hadn't been such a wicked old screw, he might have had somebody to look after him when he was dying," said the man, throwing down a pair of cuff-links. "It serves him right."

Scrooge watched while a few coins changed hands.

"Spirit," he said, "doesn't anyone feel sorry for this man's death? Show me someone with some feeling about it!"

The Ghost spread its dark robe out like a wing and then drew it back to show a room where a mother sat with her young children. Then her husband came in, looking ill and worried. Yet there was a look of joy on his face, too.

"We have more time to pay our debt," he said.

"Has the old man relented, then?" asked his wife eagerly.

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"No," said her husband, "he is dead."

The wife's face brightened. This was the only feeling anyone had for the old man's death – it was relief.

Scrooge begged the Spirit to show him some kinder feeling connected with a death.

For an answer, the Spirit took him to Bob Cratchit's house.

The little Cratchits were quiet. Their mother was sewing.

"Is your father coming?" she said. "He's late."

"I think he walks slower in the evenings than he did with Tiny Tim on his shoulder," said Peter.

"Your father loved Tiny Tim, and he was so light to carry," said their mother.

Just then Bob came in, wearing his comforter, and his family hurried to get his tea. He had been to the cemetery.

"It's a lovely place," said Bob. "I promised Tiny Tim we'd go there every Sunday."

Bob had met Scrooge's nephew in the street. Fred had told him how sorry he was and asked what he could do to help.

"We must never forget Tiny Tim," said Bob to his family. "We must never quarrel with each other, for he was so patient and good."

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They all hugged and kissed each other and made the promise.

"I am very happy," said Bob, looking round at his wife a d children.

Scrooge said anxiously to the Spirit, "Show me myself as I shall be in years to come!"

The Spirit took him to his office, but another man sat at his desk. Scrooge began to feel a sense of dread.

The tall black figure led him on, still pointing, to an iron gateway. It led to a neglected churchyard, where the grass and nettles had grown high. The Spirit stood among the graves and its long finger pointed to one.

Scrooge said "Tell me, Spirit, are these things that *will* happen, or are they things that *may* happen? Can they not be changed?"

But the Spirit still pointed at the grave without speaking. On the stone, Scrooge read his own name –

EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"No, no," he cried, clutching the Spirit's robe. "I am not that man! I will not be that man! Isn't there any hope for me? Can I change what you have shown me?"

The Spirit's hand trembled.

"I promise to keep Christmas in my heart, all the year round! I promise to remember the

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lessons the Spirits have taught me – Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Future! Please tell me I can change the writing on this stone!''

As he begged the Spirit, he saw an alteration in its hood and dress, It shrank, collapsed and changed – into a bedpost.



God Bless Us, Every One!

It was his own bedpost and his own bedroom! And it was his own time ahead to make up for the past.

He scrambled out of bed and clutched the bed-curtains. They had not been torn down and sold! He put on his clothes, inside out, upside down, any way, laughing and crying at the same time.

''A Merry Christmas, everybody,'' he shouted. ''A Happy New Year to all the world!''

Then he heard the church bells ringing out. Clash, Clash, Hammer, Ding Dong Bell! The fog had cleared away. It was golden sunlight and fresh morning air. He flung open the window.

''What day is it?'' he called to a boy in the street below.

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"What day? Why, Christmas Day!"

He had not lost any time after all! The Spirits had shown him all their wonders in one night, and it was still Christmas morning. Scrooge took out some money.

"Go down to the butcher's in the next street," he said, "and bring back the biggest turkey in the shop. Yes, that's right, the Prize Turkey. Get the man to come back with you so that I can tell him where to take it – and I'll give you half a crown!"

The boy ran off down the street. Half a crown was a lot of money in those days.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit," chuckled Scrooge. "He won't know where it's come from. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!"

After he had sent the man off with the turkey, he had a good look at the door knocker. "What an honest expression it has! It's a wonderful knocker!" he said.

After he had shaved and dressed up in his best suit, Scrooge went out. He smiled at all the people he met and wished them a Merry Christmas and they returned the greeting. Then he spotted the plump gentleman who had been collecting for the poor. He went up and whispered in his ear. The plump gentleman looked amazed and delighted.

"A great many back payments are included in that!" Scrooge said.

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Next, he marched boldly up to his nephew's front door and rang the bell.

"It's your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Of course he would! He nearly shook his hand off. They had the most wonderful party and Scrooge joined in it all – games, dancing, and singing carols.

Next morning, though, he was up early. He wanted to catch Bob Cratchit coming late to the office. Sure enough, poor Bob tried to sneak in unnoticed, quarter of an hour after his usual time. He got rid of his hat and comforter and jumped on his stool, writing away as if his life depended on it.

Scrooge growled at him, pretending to be his old horrible self.

"What do you mean by coming in at this time of day?" he snapped.

"I'm very sorry," said Bob meekly. "It's only once a year."

Scrooge said, "I'm not going to stand this sort of thing any longer," – giving Bob a dig in the waistcoat – "and therefore –" giving him another dig that pushed him right back into the outer office "– therefore – I am about to RAISE YOUR WAGES!"

Bob thought Scrooge had gone mad. He looked about for the long wooden ruler.

"A Merry Christmas, Bob," said Scrooge.

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"A Merrier Christmas than I have given you. for many a year, my poor fellow! Make up the fire – let's have a real blaze – and fetch another bucket of coal! I'll look after your family and help Tiny Tim – and we'll brew up a hot toddy this afternoon to celebrate!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and more, and to Tiny Tim (who did *not* die) he was a second father.

He became as good a friend, as good a master and as good a man as the good old City of London knew, or any city in the good old world!

He saw no more Spirits. But it was said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas as well as any man alive.

May that be true of all of us! As Tiny Tim once said, "God Bless Us, Every One!"



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ISBN 9971 4 0350 1

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